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ABSTRACT

Curriculum content, personnel qualifications, hiring practices, facilities and equipment, parental and student rights, and school board impartiality, while important factors, do not insure the success of a desegregation effort within any school district. Without strong support from people within the community, including business, political, religious, and social sectors, desegregation efforts will not be successful. In addition, school district officials and the elected board members must be unambiguously supportive of desegregation, because their attitudes influence those of the adults in the community. Among community members, parents, in particular, do much to mold children's attitudes, and should therefore become well informed about desegregation. School staff must understand students' perceptions, feelings, and questions, and be willing to openly respond to potentially explosive concerns. In addition, faculty must encourage effective communication and dialogue. Administrators should both support teacher efforts to foster integration and be willing to move along more reticent faculty members. In sum, all participants have important responsibilities in regard to school desegregation. Their efforts should be characterized by sincerity, humanity, and the recognition that today's children are the adults of tomorrow. (GC)

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# DESEGREGATION: THE NEXT STEP

By Bradley Scott

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Planning the education of today's child to live in tomorrow's world places us unquestionably in the midst of one of the most controversial issues in . . . education. To what degree should . . . education focus on the future?

That question bothers me a bit. I'm not sure if we should be trying to separate the present from the future, or to separate what is taught today and where it is taught for coping today, from what will be needed to cope tomorrow. To teach a child to cope today is to teach that child to cope tomorrow. It is my firm belief that to set our sights only on the future at the expense of the present is to be unrealistic regarding what education or school desegregation ought to do. The adults of tomorrow are your children. They have to practice now what they will have to perform tomorrow. They need the skills today. Even though the future has always grown out of the present, people - parents, educators, administrators, politicians, community leaders, etc., have not always acted as though it were true.

It has never ceased to amaze me the way that some people who lack the necessary charity long to return to the "good old" days on the one hand and reach for a future that somehow will take care of itself on the other.

Now, we are clear-thinking here. I don't think I am making an unreasonable assumption when I say that I am sure that you

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have a concern about the future. That future is dependent upon the present. It will not just happen. If our present educational programs do not help it to happen, then in essence, we will short-change our future and the citizens thereof. We must educate and rear our children today with our sights set on the future.

In order to get there, let's back up and review where we've been. We need next to scan where you presently find yourselves. Then and only then should we concern ourselves with what tomorrow, the future, will hold.

Generally, schools have been seriously involved in desegregation. The history of racial resistance, negative attitudes and outright attempts to block desegregation activity has been well documented. Although it need not be reviewed here, it should not be forgotten. For our purposes, let us be aware that whatever the predecessor to your present situation was here, it can easily be so again where people allow it.

But you reached a point of desegregation. The Texas Advisory Committee to the U. S. Commission on Civil Rights has identified five major elements which need to be considered when important issues arise concerning the education of children: (you've probably considered these elements). FIRST, consideration must be given to the curriculum including its relevance to the total population for whom it is designed (with regards to race/ethnic/cultural, age, academic considerations). SECOND, Personnel is another important element to consider. The qualifications

of the staff including administrators, teachers and other professionals as well as the support personnel must be examined. Hiring, utilization, promotion, transfer, disciplinary and other personnel practices must be examined to insure that they are free from discrimination. THIRD, the school plant and the equipment are factors which must be considered. The condition, amount, and adequacy the facility(ies) and equipment impacts heavily upon the education of children. The FOURTH element for consideration is the fundamental constitutional rights of parents and students. Because the meanings of the law and its application are a matter of interpretation, those in a position to do so must insure that individuals are treated fairly and without discrimination. This may be extremely difficult for the person who sees only parents and students rather than individuals of varying social, economic, racial/ethnic/cultural backgrounds.

The preceeding four points can only be addressed superficially if the fifth element does not operate in a responsible and obligatory fashion. This last element is the school board members who, in truth, represent the people that put them on the board. They are responsible to the total population they represent and for meeting the interests of those represented. Their obligation is to do this in an impartial and fair manner.

There are difficulties that have arisen out of desegregation. Some of these difficulties are real, some are imagined. It must be understood by everyone involved in desegregation effort that a great deal of planning and support from many different

sources must be evident.

WHAT DO YOU DO AFTER YOU DESEGREGATE?

When one speaks about curriculum, personnel, personnel practices, (hiring, promotions, etc.,), facilities and equipment, rights of parents and students and the school board as factors which must be considered in desegregation and integration activity, one cannot stop there.

These elements in themselves do not insure the success of a desegregation effort within any school district. There is a larger question that must be addressed. This question speaks to how these elements and others must interact to bring about a truly integrated school setting.

Integration activities in a school district are not and cannot be viewed separately from the community or communities of which the school is a part. The number of people within the school who are fully supportive of desegregation activity will mean very little if the community at large is opposed to it. To paraphrase Fulfilling The Letter and Spirit of the Law, the community includes business, political, religious and social leaders.

Without vigorous and committed support from people within these sectors, desegregation efforts will be shallow at best. With their support efforts can and have moved along in a geometrical manner. Another reality which exists is the fact that a

school district cannot, absolutely cannot be reticent in its desegregation activities if the general community wants desegregation. It is to that same degree that such effort can be thwarted when the general community does not care.

The opinions of the social and religious leaders easily impact upon students, parents, school personnel and the school board. The relations between the school district on the one hand and the business and political leaders on the other may be unclear to the casual observer. The tax dollars of business leaders mean just as much to the local monies that support the school as does the revenue collected from citizens. In many instances, it may mean more business leaders reaction for or against and support of desegregation will be very influential in such activity.

The school board is an elected body. Historically, an elected body is and needs to be responsive to its electorate. It is most desirable when the electorate and the constituency are the same, as opposed to what generally happens which is that the constituency is a small part of the electorate. He who elects speaks. The school board must respond to the voices they hear. If the political leaders and voters support desegregation, that will be their manner of operation. The reverse of this is also true.

The school district is not without its influence and control. A superintendent who constantly makes strong supportive statements and exhibits supportive and directive action in the behalf of desegregation is a singly powerful factor. The superintendent's position is reflected through the other levels of operation

within the district. There is little doubt that where successful desegregation efforts are underway, a responsive and skilled superintendent is spearheading the efforts.

In addition to community leaders, the superintendent, the courts and law enforcement officials exist the "grassroot elements" of school desegregation. These groups include the students, parents and school personnel.

Within the school, students being exposed to new students, many of whom exhibit behaviors and ways of thinking different than their own, may find personal attitude and perception affected in negative ways. Being introduced to a curriculum that is multi-cultural and that speaks to the needs of majority and minority students for many may cause reactions and hardships. Such possibilities which may arise need to be prepared for. It is the parents and school personnel that must play crucial roles in the effort.

Parents have a dual responsibility. They first must seek to become informed about what desegregation is; how it is being brought about; who is involved therein and how. They must understand how the impact will affect their children insofar as curricular and extracurricular activities are concerned. Parents who are not informed about such matters are most easily and very often swayed by misinformation. An uninformed parent population can do a great deal to sway student perceptions and attitudes toward the negative. Student attitudes and ways of perceiving generally reflect those of the parents reinforcement for

misperceptions and poor attitude can be found quite easily in a setting that lacks the proper support.

Proper support on the parent part is the second facet of dual responsibility. Students involved in desegregation and integration have many questions, as well as ambivalent feelings and reactions. Part of clearing up the ambivalence and answering questions falls squarely on the parents' shoulders.

The other part of the responsibility must surely be shared by the school staff including support staff, professioals and paraprofessionals and administration. The faculty must be as responsive to student perceptions, attitude and questions as parents, because the faculty consideration must also be given on a day-to-day basis. They must exercise insight as they review and present curriculum; insight that shows sensitivity to the total student population. The faculty must speak to the issues and concerns that may be potentially explosive. They do this best by keeping in touch with student perception, feelings, and questions and willingly respond to them.

The faculty responsibility does not stop there. The total faculty, including aides and assistants, must learn to model effective communication and dialogue. Students need time to practice. The school is an excellent environment for dialoging to take place, but it requires proper guidance in the mechanics for it to be effective. The faculty must look for creative ways which will give the students the opportunity to learn to appreciate difference and not to view it judgmentally. Faculty

members must be secure themselves for them to allow the students such opportunities.

Finally, administrators must be supportive and responsive to faculty endeavors. Administrators should not only support such effects to foster effective desegregation and integration activity but they must be willing to move reticent faculty members along. Administrators need to say to themselves that the degree to which their efforts are not succeeding is the degree to which the administration is not succeeding. The administration must seek out weaknesses in desegregation efforts and offer more intense support there from expertise within the districts and outside the district in the form of consultants when money is available and race desegregation assistance centers who deliver services at no charge to the district.

None of the effort on the part of any of the groups of participants is small. Each part either helps or hinders the total effort. Where anyone of the responsible parts fall short of the responsibility, be it community leaders, the superintendent and the school board, students, parents, faculty and support staff or the administration, the total effort is affected negatively. To be sure, no one is in a position to point fingers. Desegregation and integration activity is a total effort. It rarely, if ever, works in a helter/skelter or piecemeal fashion. Its effectiveness depends upon careful planning and preparation and its success truly depends on committed implementation by everyone in the district.

There are five certain points that you may consider precautions as we turn our attention toward future roles and away from present roles. We educators:

1. Must be concerned that we move with sincerity and not let pseudo intellectualism get in the way. In truth, we should become more sincere as we continue to make intellectual choices about desegregation;

2. Cannot afford to become preoccupied with self at the expense of those because of whom we are given titles and roles such as parents or educators;

3. Must realize constantly that we influence the lives of children both directly and indirectly; the impression we leave is awesome;

4. Must guard that the pride we develop is not misplaced, nor misused. We should take pride in what we have accomplished but let that pride propel us on to other goals we have or will need to establish;

5. Must not forget that we are human. We must not forget our humanity. While we must constantly be in touch with our feelings, reservations, thoughts of abject negativism, blind positivism, rejection and confusion, we must also remember the precepts of decency and fairness that initiated desegregation ... we must remember the children.

But you must do more than that . . .

You must take time to work on yourselves on negative attitudes you may have (we all have them). You will have to work

to change these attitudes, round them out until you can see and fully understand the scope of the impressive work that you are about. Once you have done that, you must then work to see that those around you can grasp the matter with the same clarity.

But you can do more than that . . .

You will need to examine the past constantly to determine what past efforts were successful and make them a part of the present. The procedures may need some changes and modifications, but that's all right. Progress has a habit of making change necessary.

But you can do more than that . . .

You must build a healthy and sound philosophy about desegregation, its role and place within the scope of education and get those around you to do the same. Together you will need to go about interacting with the new environment which will be brought about because of your desegregation activity. You will need to be testing and experimenting to insure that positive and desired change is permanent.

But you can do more than that . . .

You must continue and will need to continue to cultivate yourselves to be strong enough to endure the frustrations you will encounter from others who would keep you from the task at hand.

You must keep in mind that your plan can fail. Any desegregation plan can fail. It may look good on paper, but fail in fact. Your desegregation plan can fail if concerned and necessary

people like yourselves let the regrets you undoubtedly will have cause you to turn back or give up or stop.

Don't let it happen. Desegregation works and can work. Your desegregation plan will work exactly to the degree that you choose to have it work. There are too many instances that prove me correct for me to believe otherwise.

I wish you well and applaud you, because what you are doing and have done is necessary, right and fair.

I shall close by paraphrasing a comment made by Louis Rubin in his book The Future of Education: Perspectives on Tomorrow's Schooling.

A [school district] has a choice. It chooses itself at fateful forks in the road by turning left or right, by giving up something - and in giving up and the taking, in the deciding and not deciding, the [school district] becomes. And ever afterwards, the [district] and the people are defined by the fork and by the decision that was not made there. For the decision, once made, engraves itself into the landscape; engraves itself into things; into institutions; nerves, muscles, tendons and so on . . . The decisions that are made become a part of everything.

I wish you very well in these matters, for you are the architects of the future.

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